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Contra Aid Supporters Seek Answer on Drug Allegations

By Robert Parry
Associated Press

Congressional backers of President Reagan's proposed \$100 million aid package for Nicaraguan rebels said yesterday that allegations of contra corruption and drug trafficking must be cleared up, and one said Reagan has promised to get the answers.

Meanwhile, Democratic opponents said the aid, scheduled for a House vote Tuesday, should be withheld until a reported federal investigation is concluded into alleged drug smuggling, gun-running and possible violations of the Neutrality Act by the contras, or counterrevolutionaries, and private American supporters.

Rep. Charles W. Stenholm (D-Tex.), who favors the aid, said Reagan assured a congressional group Thursday that the White House was examining accusations that contra leaders diverted funds and that some of the anti-Sandinista rebels participated in cocaine smuggling.

Stenholm said the president promised "a written refutation" to some allegations and requested more information on others.

Rep. Robert K. Dornan (R-Calif.), another contra backer, said rebels who may have become involved in cocaine trafficking were "not drug-runners per se" but that cutoff of U.S. aid two years ago left many of them with no money to fight the Marxist Nicaraguan government.

"Desperate men do desperate things," Dornan said about the drug allegations. "But the ends do not justify the means."

The Associated Press reported this week that federal investigators, directed from Miami, are examining allegations that Nicaraguan contras and some private American backers have engaged in gun-running, drug trafficking and violations of the Neutrality Act. The news service cited U.S. officials, who insisted on anonymity, and 12 rebel backers who said they have been questioned.

State Department spokesman Bernard Kalb said Friday, "we support the efforts of the FBI, Congress and any other government agency that believes it has cause to investigate charges that members of the United Nicaraguan Opposition [UNO] are involved in illegal activities."

Kalb noted that last month, the administration supported language in the Senate-passed version of Reagan's aid package that prohibits money to any contra group retaining human-rights abusers, drug smugglers or officials who misuse funds.

The House defeated Reagan's aid request last month, but Republican strategists think that the plan has a better chance now because of the Nicaraguan government's refusal to sign a peace agreement this week and its raid into Honduras last month.